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[New York (State) Chamber of
Commerce of the State of
New York,

STEAM COMMUNICATION

//

BETWEEN

San Francisco and China.

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STEAM COMMUNICATION BETWEEN SAN FRANCISCO AND CHINA.

At the monthly meeting of the Chamber of Commerce, New-York, September 6, 1860, the following resolution was adopted:

"Resolved, That, in the judgment of this Chamber, an urgent necessity exists for the establishment, at an early day, of mail facilities between the Cities of San Francisco, in California, and Shanghai, in China, with connections at such intermediate ports as the interests of commerce may indicate."

The following gentlemen were, at the same meeting, appointed a special committee, with instructions to report, at the October meeting of the Chamber, the draft of a memorial to Congress, asking for the establishment of mail facilities between California and China, viz.:

A. A. LOW, (*Chairman*), ROYAL PHELPS, FLETCHER WESTRAY, PROSPER M. WETMORE, GEORGE OPDYKE, WM. T. COLEMAN, JOSEPH S. ALLEN.

At the monthly meeting of the Chamber of Commerce, on the 4th of October the chairman of the above committee reported the following as the form of a memorial to Congress on the subject. The report was accepted, and the memorial ordered to be printed for the use of the members.

J. SMITH HOMANS, *Secretary*.

Memorial of the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New-York.

To the honorable the Senate and House of Representatives of the
United States of America, in Congress assembled:

The Chamber of Commerce of the State of New-York, representing the foreign and domestic trade of this city, whose members are largely interested in its shipping, would respectfully submit to the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States that, in the judgment of this Chamber, an extension of the postal facilities of this country is alike necessary to the full success of its commerce, and to the maintenance of its high position among the maritime nations of the world.

Your memorialists can recall the time, within a short term of years, when the several lines of packet ships sailing out of the port of New-York had almost exclusive control of the valuable traffic between this and the principal seaports of Great Britain and France; and they have

lived to see the noble vessels, which once stood so high in the estimation of the traveller, and which bore to our shores the most costly merchandise, degraded to the service of the emigrant, to the carrying of coal, crockery and iron, and the bulky products of our own soil.

The loss to our sailing packets of the valuable trade of which they were once the unrivalled possessors, is traceable primarily to the introduction, under the fostering care of the government of Great Britain, of a line of steamers from the port of Liverpool to Boston, *via* Halifax, some twenty years ago. Indeed, with the first application of steam to ocean navigation, the British government inaugurated that system of mail communication with this country, which has never failed of the support necessary to its full establishment and permanent existence.

The vessels first employed shortly gave place to others, larger and more powerful; and, aided by subsidy after subsidy, they were soon enabled to defy competition, not only in the carrying of the mails and of first class passengers, but in the transportation of the rich fabrics of England, France and continental Europe—all the costly merchandise which is excluded from sailing vessels by the length and uncertainty of the voyage, and by the higher rates of insurance. Once firmly established upon the North Atlantic, the same system has been enlarged and extended to other countries; to the West Indies; to the east and west coasts of South America; to Africa; to the North and Baltic Seas; through the whole course of the Mediterranean and the Red Sea; to the principal ports in India; across the Indian Ocean to Singapore; and along the coast of China to the islands of the East and to Australia. It has been carried and continued through all seasons and through all climes, rearing a class of seamen inured as well to the heats and tempests of the Torrid Zone as to the cold, rough gales of the Northern winter; and, wherever the mail steamer has gone, and whence it has come, by a law which was manifest on the scene of its first triumph, the most valuable trade has followed in its course. Not only do the raw silks and the costly drugs of India and China reach their destination by Oriental and Peninsular mail steamers, but travellers, the men of wealth and the men of leisure—the merchant and the tradesman—all who value time and punctuality, seek the shores of England, in going to or returning from the various regions to which the government of that country has so wisely opened the way. And, at this very day, the American merchant, dependent upon the postal facilities afforded by his enterprising rival, opens his correspondence, and studies out the wants of most of the populous countries named, from two to three weeks after they have become known to his vigorous competitors on the other side of the water.

Under the patronage of her Britannic Majesty's government, your memorialists have seen the steamers of her mercantile marine so increased in number, as to preserve, unimpaired, a mail service, which, for safety and regularity, has excited the admiration of the world; while it has spared, for the emergencies of war, most of the transports that were needed to carry an invading army to the Crimea; and shortly afterwards, with a rapidity unknown before, another army to India, when India was all in revolt. With the return of peace, these same vessels, so prompt to answer the demand of Great Britain, and her ally in time of war, are found ready to resume their places in the carrying trade of the country, or in filling up new lines of communication then ready to be opened.

A change has thus been going on quietly, yet effectively, in the dominion of the seas; and, as a consequence of the great demand for ocean steamers, the utmost activity has prevailed along the banks of the Clyde and the Tyne, while, for years, our shipyards from Maryland to Maine have been deserted or comparatively lifeless.

Your memorialists are aware that the wisdom of the policy that has led to such results has been questioned; but, however doubted, it has been always pursued with a determination that has never faltered; till at length, the commerce of England, vitalized in all its parts, has attained a degree of prosperity without a parallel in history. The system pursued by England is now being imitated by France and other powers.

At one time it seemed to be the purpose of the United States government to adopt and continue a similar policy; to give to its merchants mail facilities co-extensive with their wants; to permit their mariners to go, side by side, along all the highways of the sea, upon equal terms with those of the most favored nation. To restore to our mercantile marine its lost prestige; to re-instate it in a supremacy which was once unquestioned, it needed only that measure of support which Great Britain and France have rendered to theirs. Whatever doctrines about free trade prevail on the other side of the Atlantic, or this, your memorialists respectfully urge, that, so long as the mail service of England and France is maintained by Imperial subsidies, the government of the United States will be compelled to imitate their liberality or submit to a mortifying alternative.

Your memorialists are not unmindful that some years, ago the Congress of the United States did, for a time, yield to the pressure of public opinion in this regard, and, that under the influence of temporary appropriations, a line of steamers was established to run from this city to Liverpool—such steamers as have never yet been surpassed for speed, for strength, for power or for efficiency; that, for a time, they were the boast

of our seamen and the delight of the American traveller; unfortunate, indeed, and through much misfortune unsuccessful; sustained while the support that brought them into existence was continued, and finally withdrawn from the ocean, if not to perish, to become valueless at the wharves of this city—a spectacle to sadden and sicken the hearts of all to whom they had once been a source of exultation and pride. Your memorialists are aware that other lines were formed to Bremen and Havre, and that under able management, the latter still continues to run unaided, or receiving only ocean and inland postage, while a few private steamers are enabled to keep the sea during the summer season.

From this survey so brief, yet so unsatisfactory; from this contrast so unwillingly drawn between the far-seeing wisdom of the British government and the short-sightedness of our own, your memorialists gladly turn to the consideration of the subject which is the more immediate purpose of this appeal.

The time seems to have fully come when the attention of the Congress of the United States should be directed to the establishment of a line of mail steamers through the waters of the Pacific Ocean to the populous countries of the Eastern world.

On one side are California and Oregon, with their long line of sea-coast; States abounding in mineral wealth, with a most productive soil, and forests boundless in extent; on the other the populous empires of Japan and China, the Philippine Islands, Java and Australia, all as accessible to the merchants of this country, by a western route, as they now are to those of the old countries by existing lines of communication.

Should a line of steamers be formed from San Francisco to China, a connection with the other important places indicated will become natural and easy. To such a consummation the signs of the times unmistakably point—lines of rail-road, running from the Atlantic, projected, if not decreed; an overland mail, which, passing through the wilderness, and over the Rocky Mountains, seeks a new issue beyond the sea; but, stronger than all else, the will of a progressive and energetic race. These are tokens of the future.

Such a line is needed to turn the tide of correspondence which now sets hither and thither, through the China Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea, and, *via* France and England, across the Atlantic, by a more direct route to and from San Francisco. It is needed, if the people of the United States would strengthen, by ties of mutual intercourse and mutual interest, the bonds of peace and amity so lately formed with the empire of Japan; if they would open up to the fullest extent the vast resources of China, an empire so ca-

pacious to take of our produce and manufactures, and so rich to return in kind; if, by exchanging the gold and silver of California for the silks and teas of both empires, the American merchants would be, to some extent, independent of foreign bankers and foreign credits; and, above all, if holding the truths of Christianity as precious, the people of the United States would give the missionary speedy access to his chosen field of labor, to the scene of much toil and sacrifice in the past, and of large promise in the future. If all these things are desirable, such a line is needed.

To such a line, the silver of Mexico, Chili and Peru, which reaches China through a long and expensive route, would soon become tributary; and so, too, would the gold of Australia, drawn to England *via* the Isthmus of Panama, by that law of commerce which makes the shortest route the best.

Your memorialists invite the attention of Congress to this noble enterprise, because it cannot be accomplished without the aid of government; and the benefits to be derived from it are national; because, if it is wise to spend millions annually, in time of peace, for the defence of our commerce in the event of war, it seems to be wise to appropriate the public money towards building up a mercantile marine, which has been proved to be as valuable in war as in peace. And your memorialists pray, that this great step in our country's progress may not be deferred to another day, and the honor of it to another Congress; but that a sufficient subsidy be granted to any company that will undertake to perform the service in question under proper guarantees and conditions.

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